DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 395 751 RC 020 643

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TITLE	What Academic Programs Are Offered Most Frequently in Schools Serving American Indian and Alaska Native Students? Issue Brief.
INSTITUTION	American Institutes for Research, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	National Center for Education Statistics (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	IB-3-96; NCES-96-841
PUB DATE	Apr 96
NOTE	4p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Alaska Natives; *American Indian Education; American Indians; Bilingual Education; College Preparation; Elementary Secondary Education; Gifted; *Public Schools; Remedial Instruction; *School Activities; *School Statistics; School Surveys; Tribally Controlled Education
IDENTIFIERS	*Bureau of Indian Affairs Schools; *Schools and Staffing Survey (NCES)

ABSTRACT

This brief summarizes data on the types of academic programs offered in schools serving American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) students. The 1990-91 American Indian and Alaska Native supplement to the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics provides detailed information on schools serving AIAN students. Three distinctive schooling environments for AIAN students were examined: the 149 schools operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA schools) or by Indian tribes under contract to the BIA (tribal schools), the 1,260 public schools with 25 percent or greater AIAN enrollment (high-AIAN), and the 78,625 public schools with less than 25 percent AIAN enrollment (low-AIAN). BIA/tribal schools serve AIAN students almost exclusively; most are small elementary schools. SASS data indicate that BIA/tribal schools were more likely than public schools to offer Chapter 1, remedial math, and bilingual education programs, and were less likely than public schools to offer academic enrichment programs for gifted and talented students. Bilingual programs, which use the native language to varying degrees in instructing students, were offered in 64 percent of BIA/tribal schools, while 45 percent of BIA/tribal schools reported having English as a second language programs. Among schools serving 12th-graders, BIA/tribal schools and high-AIAN public schools offered college preparatory programs less frequently than did low-AIAN schools. (SV)

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ISSUE BRIEF
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U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement

National Center for Education Statistics

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ISSUE BRIEF

What Academic Programs Are Offered Most Frequently in Schools Serving American Indian and Alaska Native Students?

APRIL 1996
IB–3–96

Educators recognize that improvement of the academic achievement of American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) students is critical to the future of Native communities (Indian Nations at Risk Task Force 1991). For this reason, it is important to describe the types of academic programs offered in schools serving these students. Reviewing these types of programs may provide insight into the student populations being served, since many programs limit enrollment to students who meet selected eligibility requirements.

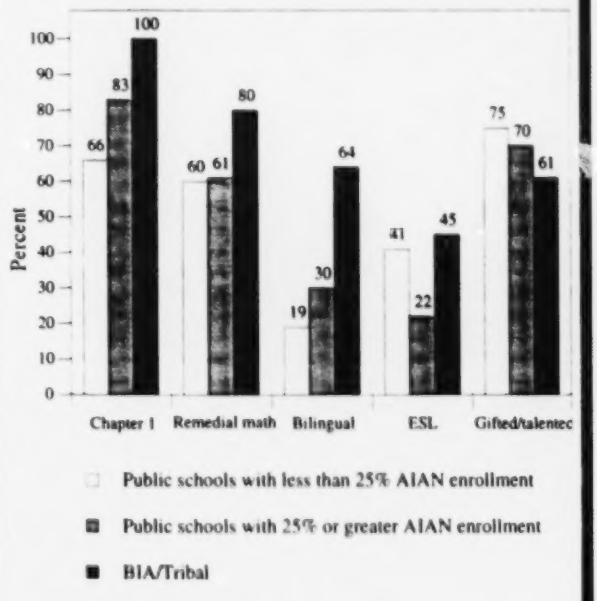
Because the AIAN student population is relatively small (about 1 percent of the total student population in the United States), these students and the schools and teachers who serve them are almost never represented in national education studies (National Education Association 1991). However, the 1990–91 American Indian and Alaska Native supplement to the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), provides detailed information on this population.

These 1990–91 SASS data can be used to examine three distinctive schooling environments for AIAN students: the 149 schools that are operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA schools) or by Indian tribes under contract with the BIA (Tribal schools),* and two types of public schools—the 1,260 high-AIAN public schools (i.e., with 25 percent or greater enrollments of AIAN students) and the 78,625 low-AIAN public schools (i.e., with less than 25 percent AIAN enrollments). According to 1990–91 SASS data, BIA/Tribal schools serve fewer than 10 percent of Native students, are not part of the public school system, and serve AIAN students almost exclusively. Most of these schools are elementary schools with fewer than 500 students. This brief compares the academic programs most frequently offered in BIA/Tribal schools with their availability in public schools.

Greater percentages of BIA/Tribal schools offered Chapter 1, remedial math, and bilingual programs in 1990–91 than did the public schools.

Chapter 1 programs were designed to help raise the academic functioning of educationally disadvantaged children. (In 1994, Chapter 1 was reauthorized and renamed Title I.) All BIA/Tribal schools and 83 percent of high-AIAN public schools provided Chapter 1 programs (figure 1). In comparison, two-thirds of low-AIAN public schools had such programs. Similarly, while 80 percent of BIA/Tribal schools offered remedial math classes to assist students performing below their academic grade level in this area, lower percentages of both high- and low-AIAN public schools offered remedial math classes.

Figure 1. Percentages of BIA/Tribal schools and public schools offering selected academic programs to students, by school type: 1990–91



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1990–91 Schools and Staffing Survey (Indian and Public School Questionnaires).

* The two types of schools operated under the auspices of the BIA can be separated for purposes of other analyses. In this brief, BIA/Tribal schools are combined into a single classification on account of their relatively small sample sizes.

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These three classifications of schools also differed in the extent to which they offered specific programs to assist students in achieving English proficiency. Bilingual programs, which use the native language to varying degrees in instructing students, were offered in 64 percent of the BIA/Tribal schools. Bilingual education classes were less common in both types of public schools, although high-AIAN schools were more likely than low-AIAN schools to report offering such classes. Forty-five percent of BIA/Tribal schools also reported having English as a Second Language (ESL) programs, in which students with limited English proficiency are provided with intensive instruction in English. Low-AIAN public schools were about as likely as BIA/Tribal schools to report offering ESL classes.

BIA/Tribal schools were less likely than low-AIAN public schools to offer programs for gifted and talented students. Sixty-one percent of BIA/Tribal schools offered these programs, compared to 75 percent of low-AIAN schools (figure 1). However, BIA/Tribal schools did not differ significantly from high-AIAN public schools in providing programs for gifted and talented students.

BIA/Tribal schools and high-AIAN public schools serving 12th graders were less likely to offer college preparatory programs than low-AIAN public schools.

About 54 percent of the BIA/Tribal schools and high-AIAN public schools had college preparatory programs, compared to over three-quarters of low-AIAN public schools (table 1). However, the average percentages of students enrolled in these programs in BIA/Tribal schools and high-AIAN public schools appear slightly smaller but are not statistically different from schools with low-AIAN enrollment.

Table 1. Percentage of BIA/Tribal and public schools serving 12th graders with college preparatory programs and average percentage enrollment of 10th–12th graders, by school type: 1990–91

	% with college preparatory programs	Average % enrollment of 10th–12th graders in these programs
Public schools with less than 25% AIAN enrollment	76.2	52.0
Public schools with 25% or greater AIAN enrollment	54.9	49.3
BIA/Tribal	54.0	37.6

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1990–91 Schools and Staffing Survey (Indian and Public School Questionnaires).

Discussion

SASS data on the selected academic programs reported to be offered most frequently in BIA/Tribal schools in 1990–91 indicate that BIA/Tribal schools were more likely to offer Chapter 1, remedial math, and bilingual education programs than were public schools. On the other hand, public schools, regardless of the level of AIAN student enrollment, were more likely to offer academic enrichment programs for gifted and talented students than BIA/Tribal schools. Among schools serving 12th graders, BIA/Tribal schools and high-AIAN public schools offered college preparatory programs less frequently than did low-AIAN schools. Further issues that remain to be examined with these SASS data include the availability of other programs (e.g., prekindergarten, extended-day, vocational-technical, and remedial reading programs) in schools serving AIAN students and the differences in characteristics and stated education-related goals of BIA/Tribal and high-AIAN schools that offer college preparatory programs and those that do not. It has also been suggested that parental involvement in curriculum decisionmaking may be a critical factor in determining the educational development of AIAN students (Noley 1994), and this too may be examined using SASS data. The current availability of SASS data for 1993–94 provides additional resources for analyses in this area.

References and Related Publications:

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This **Issue Brief** was prepared by Bruce Christenson, Robert Rossi, and Shannon Daugherty, American Institutes for Research. To obtain standard errors or definitions of terms for this **Issue Brief**, or to obtain additional information about the Schools and Staffing Survey, contact Charles H. Hammer (202) 219–1330. To order additional copies of this **Issue Brief** or other NCES publications, call 1–800–424–1616.

NCES 96–841